

VZCZCXRO7051
OO RUEHCN RUEHGH RUEHVC
DE RUEHIN #0140/01 0410856
ZNY CCCCC ZZH
O 100856Z FEB 09
FM AIT TAIPEI
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 0864
INFO RUEHOO/CHINA POSTS COLLECTIVE IMMEDIATE
RHEHAAA/NATIONAL SECURITY COUNCIL WASHINGTON DC IMMEDIATE
RUEAIIA/CIA WASHDC IMMEDIATE
RHEFDIA/DIA WASHINGTON DC IMMEDIATE
RHHMUNA/USPACOM HONOLULU HI IMMEDIATE
RUEHGV/USMISSION GENEVA IMMEDIATE 1890

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 TAIPEI 000140

SIPDIS

E.O. 12958: DECL: 02/09/2019
TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PINR](#) [WHO](#) [CH](#) [TW](#)
SUBJECT: KMT CHAIRMAN WU POH-HSIUNG ON DOMESTIC POLITICS
AND WHA OBSERVERSHIP

Classified By: AIT Director Stephen M. Young for reasons 1.4(b/d)

11. (C) Summary. Although the global economic environment would make 2009 a tough year for Taiwan's ruling party, the KMT was in relatively good shape to face the electoral challenges ahead, KMT Chairman Wu Poh-hsiung told the Director during a wide-ranging February 9 dinner. The December race for Taipei County Magistrate was the year's most important election and the opposition DPP was likely to nominate party heavyweight Su Tseng-chang. Calling Taiwan's push for WHA Observer status the most important issue in cross-Straits relations in the coming months, Wu expressed the hope that the United States, Japan and the EU would give strong public support for this goal. End Summary.

Domestic Politics: Environment Tough, But KMT Ready

12. (C) KMT Party Chairman Wu Poh-hsiung began his February 9 dinner with the Director by congratulating President Obama on his election and noting the significant economic and political challenges he faced. The global economic downturn made it a difficult time for any ruling party, Wu said, and the KMT was likely to feel the impact at the polls. Nevertheless, Wu expressed confidence that his party would maintain its dominant position in Taiwan politics.

13. (C) The most immediate test will be the late March by-election to replace KMT legislator Diane Lee, who was forced to resign after it was revealed that she had violated Taiwan law by maintaining foreign (U.S.) citizenship while serving in the Legislative Yuan. While Lee's former district was reliably pro-KMT, Wu said, the party would have to coordinate to ensure victory. Wu welcomed the prospect of a DPP call for voters to support its candidate to punish the KMT for Lee's actions. By that standard, he quipped, voters would need to vote against DPP candidates for 50 years in response to former President Chen Shui-bian's misdeeds.

14. (C) The more significant test would be the December elections for local officials and, in particular, the position of Taipei County Magistrate. If a DPP candidate wins this race, it will put him in control of a jurisdiction of nearly four million people and give him a national platform from which to prepare a presidential race in 2012, Wu noted. Although Su Tseng-chang had denied interest in running, Wu expected the DPP heavyweight was being coy and ultimately would agree to run. The KMT planned to wait until the DPP named its candidates for the December elections before announcing its own, Wu said, to make sure it had the best possible match-ups. Asked whether Chou Hsi-wei would run for reelection in Taipei County, Wu suggested that it was likely the KMT would look for a stronger candidate.

15. (C) The Director expressed concern about the growing rift

in Taiwan politics and society, as DPP leaders and supporters became increasingly polarized. Thailand provided a cautionary tale of what might happen when political parties are unable to communicate with each other, he said, and the KMT and DPP needed to find ways to discuss the key issues facing Taiwan. Wu agreed that the lack of communication between the parties was a problem, but attributed this to DPP Chairman Tsai Ing-wen's unwillingness to take up KMT leaders' "unconditional" call for dialogue.

Cross-Strait: WHA Main Focus, U.S. Support Needed

¶6. (C) No date had been set for the next Cross-Strait Economic and Cultural Forum (commonly referred to as the KMT-CCP Forum), Wu said. For now, beyond the technical economic agreements being discussed between SEF and ARATS, Taipei's main focus was on Taiwan's effort to obtain WHA Observer status in May. Although there were no formal discussions of the issue, Wu said, the two sides had plenty of informal channels to pursue this question. Taiwan was flexible about the name under which it would participate and, in principle, could accept a solution that included some kind of annual review of its participation.

¶7. (C) A crucial political issue, Wu said, was to avoid the appearance that WHA Observer status was a unilateral gift to Taiwan from the PRC. Rather than keep the decision low-profile, the United States, Japan and others needed to find the opportunity to voice their public support for Taiwan's inclusion. Tokyo in particular had a practical

TAIPEI 00000140 002 OF 002

reason for wanting to integrate Taiwan fully into global health systems, given the amount of travel between Taiwan and Japan and the ease with which communicable diseases could therefore spread from one to the other. From a political perspective, the Ma administration needed the visible support of its friends and allies to convince voters that Taiwan was not simply becoming a client of China.

Comment

¶8. (C) There have been some reports that Wu may be looking for a way out of the KMT Chairmanship. He certainly showed no signs of this in this latest meeting, energetic and engaged even on relatively minor details of the party's operations. Wu was quick to credit his vigor to having lost nearly 30 lbs through a diet his doctor (and dinner partner) had put him on. On the other hand, some KMT insiders have suggested President Ma wants to reclaim the post of KMT Chairman this spring, as a means of consolidating his power. If so, Wu may be preparing to defend his position in what could turn into a messy public contest.
SYOUNG